

HISTORY ON THE HILL

10 PETER STREET, ELTHAM, 3095

Filling the rambling 1940s house built by renowned Eltham icon is on the market.

Starbuck predates Pulling and the mud brick movement by more than three decades. At 103 years old, it is surely one of Eltham's oldest buildings.

But what makes Starbuck so important – and what gives its 3841-square-metre black heritage status – is much more than just its age. Like Pulling, which was a sanctuary for intellectuals, writers, thinkers and painters, Starbuck played a central role in Eltham's artistic past.

Starbuck hill – six-and-a-half hectares above the Diamond Creek – was purchased by artist Will Longstaff in 1900. He commissioned Harold Desbrow-Anear, the father of arts and craft architecture in Australia, to build the stucco and jarrah cottage on the hill's crest in 1900.

Not long after, Longstaff became an official World War I artist. His most famous painting *Ghosts of Mirna Gate* now hangs in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

The property was sold in 1919 and its land was eventually subdivided into residential blocks. The then-owners – the Handfields – added on the east-facing sunroom styled on a South African stoep. It is from up here that residents of Starbuck would have watched Eltham grow over the years from rural outpost to the thriving suburb it is today.

Among those moving to Eltham in the 1920s was Bishop Reginald Stephen, a scholar related to the great poet T.S. Eliot. Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf. Stephen then nested Starbuck to journalist-turned-builder John Harcourt, who was building his own iconic house Clay Numanan down by the creek.

Harcourt's mud-brick creations are so commonplace in the area that Starbuck hill is often called "Harcourt Hill".

Clem and Nina Christensen moved to Starbuck in the same year that Gordon Ford was turning his patch of orchard into his now-famous native garden at Pulling.

During this period Starbuck, like Pulling, established itself as a hub for ideas, words and music.

Nina was an academic and head of the Russian language and literature school at Melbourne University and husband Clem was the founder of literary journal *Meanjin*. The pair held many Russian parties on the hilltop for great Australian and overseas thinkers and artists, including novelist Patrick White and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich.

The lounge room, with its Californian rewood dado walls and striking corner fireplace, was no doubt the backdrop for many wine or vodka-fuelled conversations. The nearby sunroom remains the ideal spot for reading, writing and basking in the views across Eltham.

The homely kitchen includes a larder, and is connected to the dining room and the outdoor terrace. Meals are served wherever the weather dictates.

Having changed hands over the years, Starbuck has also changed in size and shape. A rumpus room was added in the 1950s, but the most significant alteration was completed by the current owners.

In their eight years here, they have doubled the amount of living space in a style almost identical to the original house. They added on four big new bedrooms, a stunning timeless bathroom and a double garage with internal access. The only things that distinguish the new wing from the old are the age of the timber and the heating panels. The rest of the house has the original cast iron radiators.

The owners also did a lot outside. They built a detached four-car garage with a mezzanine level and single carport. They put in 26,000 litres of tanks for the toilet, laundry and, of course, the beautiful garden.

The grounds include a large terrace, two veggie gardens with fruit trees, and a chicken coop. Native and exotic plants mingle among the out-houses, including the detached potting shed and the artists' studio with en suite.

The owners have successfully renovated and restored this property, ensuring it can live well into the future without forgetting its past.

LIAM CARTER

property@theweeklyreview.com.au



FINAL WORD

"WITH VIEWS ACROSS ELTHAM AND AN INSPIRED EXTENSION, THIS IS WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF ELTHAM'S FINEST HOMES." CHRIS CHAPMAN – AGENT

Fletchers \ 9430 1111 Price \ \$1.3 million + Expressions of Interest \ Closing June 4 at 5pm

**Fast facts ** 103-year-old, Arts and Crafts residence designed by architect Harold Desbrow-Anear; 3841-square metre hilltop block; views of Eltham township; period features including century-old fireplaces and timber panelling; picture rails, floorboards and marisits; African-style sunroom; kitchen with larder; rumpus; four bedrooms kids' wing; renovated bathrooms with marble finishes; double garage with internal access; detached four-car shed, two veggie patches and chicken coop.

Eltham \ 19mins from the city